DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 088 806 SP 007 761

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TITLE	Its Wisdom and Its Folly. [Competency-Based Teacher Education].
PUB DATE	[74]
NOTE	15p.
EDRS PRICE	MF-$0.75 HC-$1.50
DESCRIPTORS	*Performance Criteria; Performance Tests; *State Departments of Education; State Standards; *Teacher Certification; Values
IDENTIFIERS	Competency Based Certification

ABSTRACT

This paper discusses factors related to the development of a good state competency-based certification system in order to make educational reforms which are compatible with a localized value system. One factor is the leadership positions of state certification personnel that enable them to become instrumental in making certification policies by giving them opportunities to promote far-reaching reforms in education. Two different philosophies of education reform are then discussed--democratic localism and insipient democracy, the latter having been followed by most state education agencies. However, the competency movement should change this since it is an attempt to alter the locus of authority within the education system. A new type of teaching exam, designed to provide information relevant to interests of the clients such as teacher education, retention, and promotion, is another factor. The exam would be weighted so that each client could establish the profile desired; it would consist of over 40 modules in four broad categories. Film episodes to test the candidates' ability to see and understand what is going on in the classroom are also suggested. Finally, the paper recommends that a diversified and localized value system should be established to relate to the public's expectations for schools. States should support a certification system that expects diversity and challenges all to meet the highest level of accomplishment. State standards should never be rigid and procedures should be revised yearly based on constant feedback. (PD)

ED084404

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Its Wisdom a[illegible] Its Folly

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Source: PETE/AACTE
SP007761

Its Wisdom and Its Folly

This paper is not objective; it is personal, subjective and probably biased. Simply, it is what I believe.

Recently I was commissioned to prepare a paper describing national efforts to establish competency-based certification policies. This I attempted to do. One of the readers of the draft suggested the paper should also include my opinions about the various policies: For example, did I think they would work? What were the problems they would encounter?

I mentioned this idea to the gentleman who sponsored the paper. "No," he responded. "I'd like the book (my paper was one of eight chapters) to be as objective as possible." I agreed, but the idea for a personal statement was not forgotten. In the year since that time, I not only have become more committed to competency-based teacher education but also more troubled and more concerned. This paper attempts to illustrate both my commitment and my concern.

In this paper I will discuss the following:

(a) Leadership roles of state certification officials in the competency movement,

(b) Two different philosophies that unlie state attempts,

(c) An examination system that appears to have great merit,

(d) The necessity for operating from a value base.

The idea for this paper came from one of my previous efforts, the title from another. I have the ability to return to something I've written previously (months or years before) and read it as if I have never seen it. I did this recently and was struck by a phrase that I had used in describing a state education department. The line: "The State in its wisdom and folly is many things." "Its Wisdom and Its Folly" seems to be an appropriate

title for this effort - a personal analysis of state education departments' attitudes toward competency-based teacher education and certification.

I believe that state certification personnel have been one of the leading forces behind the development of the competency-movement. Most people, however, know little about these people. Dr. Marshall Frinks completed for his dissertation an analysis of persons serving in these roles. A look at his findings may be helpful in understanding certification people (I consider myself one of these, by the way). This study did not focus on those who simply process certificates but describes broadly those who make and interpret policy.

He reported:

> Most of the certification leaders are male and come from a broad range of experiences and backgrounds. Over one-half of the respondents (53.1 percent) have been in their present positions not less than one and not more than five years; however, one-fourth (26 percent) of the respondents have been in the same job for more than ten years. Most of the leadership personnel have had extensive experience at the local school level, but have come most recently from college or university positions to the Department. A majority of these leaders have either a master's or doctorate degree.
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> Teacher education and certification sections differ to a great degree throughout the nation

in regard to size and resources, with operational budget allocations ranging from $20,000 to over $3,000,000 in the largest state. The average percentage of overall state education budgets allocated to the teacher education and certification section was found to be 4.7 percent with allocations ranging from .02 percent to 20.7 percent.

Leadership personnel in the teacher education and certification sections are, on the whole, in decision-making positions. Over three-fourths of the participants reported no more than two decision-making levels between their positions on the organizational chart and the Chief State School Officer of the State. Sever of these leaders reported no decision-making level between their positions and the Chief.

Over two-thirds of the leadership personnel described the emphasis placed on their role in fulfilling the Department's expectation of the teacher education and certification section as one of leadership and service. Only 15 percent viewed their jobs as regulatory/administrative.

Frinks notes that certification personnel are moving more and more towards leadership positions. Thus individuals who are hired to administor certification regulations often become instrumental in making certification

policies. I am not concerned here with whether their policies are good or bad, liked or hated, carefully planned or politically motivated. Considering their backgrounds, (graduate degrees, school and collegiate experience), and their access to the superintendent and their lack of accountability to anyone except their immediate supervisors (when did you hear of a state certification officer being fired or even "transferred" because his policies were unacceptable), the potential for making policy is self-evident.

State certification officials in some states have realized that they have unique opportunities to promote far-reaching reforms in education by changing (some would say manipulating) certification regulations and program approval policies. For example, the "state" decides to require a course in "modern math" for all elementary teachers. The course is then offered, usually without much resistance by the colleges (after all it means three more hours in education and a better showing on the Full-Time Equivalent scale). In fact certification people stand in the middle of a vast constituency: the public usually silent or bombastic, the public schools and the profession-at-large cherishing the myth that teacher education programs are poor, bad, awful, (a myth not because it isn't sometimes true but because both good and bad programs and courses are tarred with the same brush), and college educators whose world grew up around state certification requirements. The constituency is so vast that it is impossible to relate to all concerns, and working for consensus may be so prolonged that nothing is ever accomplished. Such conditions encourage arbitrary and/or hurried decisions.

A skilled bureaucrat soon learns how to accomplish things within a bureaucracy. He knows when to promote ideas and to whom; he knows who really makesdecisions within the state agency and what philosophical wind

is currently blowing. I believe the "state" is really people and that policies usually come from one or two people within that bureaucracy. Usually a state board of education exists which has ultimate responsibility for making policy decisions. State boards, however, do not study certification policies; they rely on the staff of the department to do that and to make recommendations to it. The staff then also carries out those policies that it originally proposed. I am not trying to paint a Machiavellian picture, (and I don't wish to prolong this discussion) but certification people in some states have extraordinary influence over education policy and are now engaged in using that influence.

I believe it is appropriate for a certification officer to take this leadership role if he recognizes both its potential and its limitations. The decisions should not simply be made by those within the bureaucracy. Other interested parties (ad hoc committees are a typical approach) should be involved, honestly, openly and early. The greatest danger of decision-making power emanating from a certification office is that it may be motivated by state politics rather than educational reasons. More often, however, problems result from poor planning, lack of financial support, and too few personnel. Even though certification officials have the opportunity to provide educational leadership, only those with exceptional ability will see their dreams become realities.

A practical and a philosophical question disturbs me: What could or should a certification policy be designed to do? A simply statement of purpose should exist. How it is written should determine what the certification policies are. Present policies (often followed without a statement of purpose) seem to move in two different directions.

I would like to look at these developments through a structure presented by Michael Katz in Class Bureaucracy and Schools: The Illusion of

Educational Change in America. He presents four models for educational reform, tried in the past and being tried again. Two of these, I feel, are relevant:

Democratic localism - opposed centralization of power/bureaucracies, wanted local control, put faith in people and a point of view about the sources of social change; and

Incipient bureaucracy - advocated a structured system of education, sought to uplift quality of education by standardizing and systematizing its structure and content.

Obviously most state education agencies have followed the latter model. Standards have been set and appropriate efforts made to ensure these standards are met.

Why should a competency movement change this? Because in some places it has been adopted as an attempt to reform the educational system by changing the locus of authority and thereby the way in which decisions are made.

A system that believes in democratic localism might promote localized decisions, concern for the individual rather than society, and a giving up of state agency power or authority. Such characteristics are found in the Washington effort which identifies the individual child as the focus of the entire effort and allows local consortia much greater control over certification programs. Also a variety of standards will evolve and a single state standard will disappear. New York's trial projects move in this direction as does the Comfield Elementary Model being field-tested, at least in part, in Oregon.

Other states appear to be more attuned to "standardizing and systematizing" certification regulations.

New Jersey and Arizona are attempting to utilize behavioral objectives to certify teachers. Other states such as Minnesota are specifying specific

competencies that teachers must possess and demonstrate. Florida also appears to be moving in this direction, more by its ultimate goal (the use of competency education in both the preparation of teachers and the teaching of children as a means of establishing patterns of accountability) than by its particular activities in promoting competency-based teacher education programs.

Obviously all states wish to "uplift the quality of public education" but I believe the values behind these efforts are different. In one the belief is that the state must improve its guardianship of the public interest by setting ever higher standards and developing more efficient systems of management. In one sense the state knows what is best. In the other view, the state must promote change rather than mandate it and accept diversity as more responsive to the state's needs than mandated single standards.

And what do I believe? I can argue for either viewpoint. And recent developments in New York State indicate that one bureaucracy can promote both views, causing, I believe, some of the confusion that now exists in the state over exactly what the Division of Teacher Educationand Certification is attempting to do. If you give me a statement of purpose, I think I could design a proper state role. For example, a cognitive examination could even now be used to screen some candidates. Everyone knows the limitation of present examinations when they have been used for certification. However, I recently visited a college and saw such extremely poor examples of student work that I could argue for such exams even if they only screened for cognitive abilities.
However, I am more deeply impressed by a model for a new type of teaching exam described by Donald Medley (University of Virginia). It is impossible

to do justice briefly to his ideas but I will try. He describes an examination that would be designed to provide "clients interested in teacher education, retention, promotion, certification, etc. with information relevant to these interests in a focus which would facilitate their using it in whatever way they see fit." The exam would be weighted so that each client could establish the profile desired. Over 40 modules in four broad categories (The Cultural Area, Subject-Matter Area, Teaching Area, and Professionalism) are suggested. The modules, for example, include classroom management skills, discipline, knowledge of teaching strategies, sensitivity to pupil behavior, knowledge of urban black culture, and working with peers. Also suggested for this examination is the use of filmed episodes designed not to ask the candidate how a problem should be solved, but designed to "tap a candidate's ability to see and understand what is going on in the classroom."

Medley's conclusions, slightly reworded, are worth considering:

> Joyce and Harootounian have written:
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> > While we are not at all certain what combination of events makes a good lesson or what combination of qualities makes a good teacher, the potentially better teacher is one who is able to plan and control his professional behavior--to teach many kinds of lessons, to reach many diverse learners, to create different social climates, and to adapt a wide range of teaching strategies to constantly changing conditions...Our definition of the "good" teacher is not someone who teaches in a certain way but someone with the capacity to create and carry out strategies and maneuvers that he modifies constantly in response to student behavior.

The reason why the schoolman does not like Joyce and Harootounian's definition is that it is useless to him. The school administrator must act as though he knows what makes a good teacher, even if he doesn't. Someone has to decide which teachers to hire, which to promote, which to fire. That someone is not ETS (nor, I might add, the State). ETS (the State) can assist in the process by giving the decision-maker the maximum amount of the information he needs about the teachers from whom he must choose. ETS (the State) can also help him study the effects of his decisions and gradually improve them. This is the proper function of the teacher examination service (and perhaps of a state education agency).

Neither of these functions requires ETS (the State) to know what makes a good teacher. A test or test battery which will predict how well a teacher will teach is out of reach; it is neither necessary nor possible to construct such a test at present. But a test or test battery that will predict how a teacher will teach may be possible, and would certainly be useful.

Could an appropriate role for a certiiication office be to provide information rather than attest to the possession of certain skills or competencies? If the exam Medley describes can be perfected, a state could use it in many ways - it could set state minimums in various modules or it could use it to provide information for localized use: it could support either of Katz's theories. The potential for such an examination does appeal to me.

States attempting to establish required competencies and/or use behavioral objectives have a tremendous challenge in making their systems operational and effective. It is easy to require a competency, but my experience in New York State where we recently established reading competencies for elementary teachers makes me pessimistic that the efforts can produce the needed change. Establishing criteria for rating how well the competency has been met must be done; it is not easy.

I hesitate to be critical of these attempts, however, because as one of my friends said, "Maybe if we don't tell them they can't do it, they will." And if they do, all education will benefit.

My ambivalence about what is the best approach to competency-based certification is one of the things that troubles me. I began this paper assuming I could define and describe, if not the best, at least, a good system. Now I realize that there is no answer in isolation from a particular situation and that even the best plan would be modified as it was considered by those whom it would affect.

I am convinced, however, that I have some idea of how a state should develop its approach to competency-based teacher education. Representatives from the entire educational establishment must be involved from the earliest discussions. Implications for change resulting from competency education

have great potential and teachers, administrators, college professors, students and even the lay public deserve and will demand a role in making such decisions. Such involvement is not easy and will not guarantee a "good" approach to competency education; ignoring those who will be affected in deciding policies will ensure, however, that the best conceived plans will never become operational.

What I did realize was that I could personally only endorse a system that was consistent with the values I hold concerning the entire educational system, not simply certification. I believe that education needs to be reformed. The American system has accomplished much and is not all bad. But we know that too many children find school repressive , and too many never learn to read well enough to be considered literate. The list is long and varied. To be personal for a moment, the schools taught one of my daughters to read; they forgot, however, to teach her to want to read. My other daughter was taught to hate and fear music because it was taught by a teacher who screamed constantly and used criticism as her main teaching technique. Schools are asked to do too much and too much of what they attempt, they do poorly.

I also think it is fruitless to try and blame someone for the school's failures. Neither teachers nor teacher educators should shoulder that burden. Considerable research indicates that a child's social and ethnic environment is one of the greatest influences on his performance in school. And even such a reformer as John Holt is now hunching that despite all of the criticisms, the schools are doing what a majority of parents want.

Michael Katz believes that consensus among the public exists only on the desire for their children to "become functionally literate and able to understand mathematics." And I would agree. How then can a state establish

minimum competencies? Evaluating the competencies demands a frame of reference, at its heart a set of values; I worry about states establishing value systems, thus the frame of reference must be diversified and most likely localized. Everyone should not be subjected to my educational values and I should not have to accept the values of others. Schools should offer options and every arbitrary standard decreases this possibility.

I believe children should be given opportunities to learn in the most humane ways possible. And I believe a certification system must always be related to the public's expectations for the schools. Since we have a diverse population with varied philosophies, I believe a state should promote a certification system that expects diversity and challenges all to meet the highest level of accomplishment. Standards should never be rigid; procedures should be revised yearly based on constant feedback. I am reminded of doing chores for my father as a young boy, washing the car, for example. After an hour of reasonable effort I told my father it was done and asked, "Is it o.k.?" His answer was always, "Is it the best you can do?" A certification system should be designed not to be "o.k.", but to be "best."

In conclusion my greatest concern is that states are attempting to establish competency-based certification systems without any public frame of reference. A statement of purpose is necessary but even more necessary is understanding the values that will be promoted through implementing that statement of purpose. As one colleague commented, the performance movement is awash with competencies in search of objectives. Educators become too quickly concerned with "how to" and too often neglect "why." Katz's comments on the progressive movement might be appropriate to consider at the beginning of the competency effort.

Progressive education began as a moment in intellectual history, and combined an emphasis on community with a desire to liberate the child. In practice, though progressivism often added only a set of new wrinkles to an already overdeveloped educational bureaucracy. Rather than liberate the child from scholasticism, repression, and drill, the discovery of individual differences, as an instance, fueled the development of massive psychological testing and the creation of the guidance bureaucracy stretching from school counselors to university departments. Similarly, the professor of educational administration remains a more permanent artifact of the progressive era than Dewey's laboratory school. It was administrative values--the addition of supervisory positions, the war on inefficiency, the introduction of ability grouping--rather than the promotion of social reform through the democratic liberation of human intelligence, that most often defined the progressive spirit in practice.

We are already working to provide the support systems necessary to make competency education possible. And it takes little imagination to see the beginning of a vast new bureaucracy. I hope those who are committed, never forget why.

State planning, management, involvement will all be futile if the value foundation is not cooperatively established and made public. Washington and Illinois have their values (shared assumptions) in their published documents. Other states may also, but I am not familiar with them. Some states, I know, refuse to attempt this.

Without this foundation, the potential for significant change, resulting from the competency movement, will never be realized. But states have already begun, decisions have been made, some in wisdom, some in folly.